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You Deserve the Experience of a Lifetime: Why UCSD Joined the Breast Cancer 3-Day Crew!

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#### **Author**

Cortimiglia, Leann, RNC, CWS

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# You Deserve the Experience of a Lifetime.

## *Why UCSD Joined the Breast Cancer 3-Day Crew!*

By Leann Cortimiglia RNC/CWS  
UCSD Regional Burn Center



The San Diego Breast Cancer 3-Day benefitting Susan G. Komen for the Cure and National Philanthropic Trust is an amazing and unique opportunity. It is common knowledge that the 3 Day is a walk which raises funds for breast cancer research, but it is an experience like no other. As an RN I have had many wonderful opportunities to use my medical background and skills, but I never in my wildest imagination could I have predicted what the Breast Cancer 3-Day would do to and for me as a person, and as a nurse.

For the past 8 years I have personally become ever more committed to the Breast Cancer 3-Day as I have been touched by the amazing closeness that exists there. People say “I’ve done the heart walk,” or “I do the MS walk (or the breast walk) every year.” It is important to me that people see that the Breast Cancer 3-Day is not like these shorter walks. This is an endurance event.

It is hard to describe the passion, the compassion, the hope, determination and inspiration you will find at the Breast Cancer 3-Day. My role in the San Diego event is that of Medical Crew Captain. The medical crew has nicknamed me Mama Duck, because everywhere I go during the weekend

there are people following me around, walkers and medical crew included. My commitment began 8 years ago when I registered as a walker to try to lose weight. At that time I didn’t know anyone with breast cancer. I had no personal connection to the event. Then I broke my foot and was unable to walk as planned. The event organizer called and asked me if I would lead the medical crew. I said, “Sure I will.” I finished my (th Breast Cancer 3-Day event in November.

I am proud that for the past 2 years UCSD has been the medical partner for the San Diego Breast Cancer 3-Day, which is both an honor and a big responsibility. UCSD’s

senior leadership has been extremely supportive. Our CEO, Rich Liekwieg, has attended the event and has even ridden along in a medical support van to experience the magnitude of UCSD’s commitment. Mona Sonnenshein CFO and Trisha Lollo from Moores Cancer Center came to the campsite to see our medical team at work in the evening. Margarita Baggett CNO came to the lunch site to see what the Breast Cancer 3-Day was about. All





the leaders spoke of their amazement with the size of the event, the masses of people involved, and of our medical team's commitment to them.

The medical team is made up of 150 people. They come from San Diego, as well as from other cities in California. Our goal is for 40 team members to be from UCSD. Among our UCSD team members last year were a trauma nurse practitioner, a nurse-midwife, an anesthesiologist, and an ER physician, a social worker, and even a person who works on campus in the department of science. As a group, the team is responsible 24 hours a day for the medical needs of the entire event crew of 600, the 5,500 walkers and the Susan B. Komen staff of 50.

The event itself stretches over 60 miles, with the walkers walking approximately 20 miles a day. It begins with a moving opening ceremony, where it is so quiet that you could hear a pin drop as the participants honor

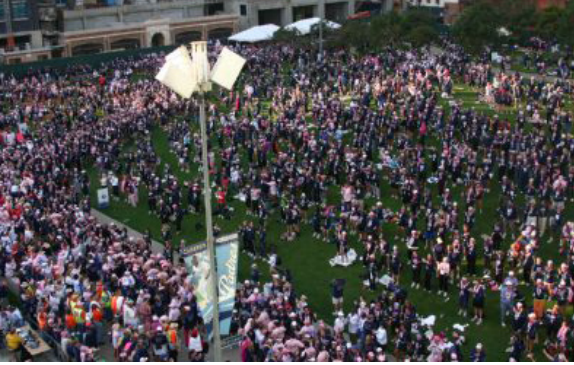
the memory of those lives lost to breast cancer. The walk begins joyfully, as families and friends cheer the walkers and crew off on their journey.

It's a virtual sea of pink. There are men and women, young and old, some walking for the first time, others who have done many of these Breast Cancer 3-Day events. There are teams of hundreds who have trained together, and there are people walking alone. However, you soon realize that no one is ever alone at this event.

It is a moving and emotional experience. I wish I could describe to you the sense of strength and hope, as thousands of people unite to travel the same way for three days with the same vision for a world one day without breast cancer. If I could, you might feel a glimmer of the power and love that exists on the 3-Day. You now have 6,000 new best friends. It is a privilege to join in, to care for these dedicated people. The feeling is amazing, magical at best-

a microcosm of what is good or right in the crazy world in which we live.

As a community, San Diego rallies to show support for both the event and the walkers all along the many miles that make up the San Diego 3 Day. Shops and restaurants put out bowls of candy, food, snacks, Kleenex, sunscreen, lip balm, balloons, and buttons. People stand in their yards, sometimes with babies in their arms all dressed in pink, with signs saying, "My mom died from breast cancer- thank you." On corners there are women in chairs, heads bald from chemo, with smiles on their faces. You might hear them say, "Thank you for walking; I can't do it this year but I'll be there next year." There are little acts of kindness, like people who open up their homes to let walkers use a real bathroom, not a port-a-potty, or those who hang a hose on the fence for people to wash their faces. The community outpouring is enough to amaze you and to make you proud to live in San



Diego. It doesn't feel like a big city when you are on the Breast Cancer 3-Day.

Along the route itself there are pit stops, five each day, placed strategically along the route. Each one is a little oasis, with food, sports drinks, water, and a medical station (as well as those necessary port-a-potties). There are unique costume themes at each one, each day- designed to help the walkers stay motivated. There are vans, called sweeps, that follow the route to pick up tired, hurt or exhausted walkers who may need a ride to the next stop.

Back at camp the medical tent is a very busy and active place . . . full of walkers needing medical care. It resembles a small town emergency room, with significant foot issues and physical therapy being the main events of the day. Even our midwife works on feet and blisters as we tape and ready walkers for the next leg of their 3 Day. A crew of over 50 people is assigned solely to the camp medical tent. They work steadily until 9 pm, when they clean up and prepare supplies for the morning rush. At that point most of the team goes back to their tents to sleep.

The on-call team members sleep in the medical tent, ready to treat urgent or emergent issues during the night. We also have ambulances with us 24 hours a day to quickly transport patients who need a higher level of care.

On Saturday and Sunday morning the team gets up and does it all over again, helping people tape and cover blisters for the next 20 miles. I don't feel jealous of any one set of feet that I tend to. I am just amazed they can walk a foot, let alone 20 miles a day, on the blisters I've seen. The fact that they can push on through the pain of these

*You overhear the participants telling each other "thank you," "I love you", and "we did it!" It is complete for another year.*

injuries is a testament to the depth of the walkers' spirit. They know that, in the United States alone, one woman is diagnosed with breast cancer every three minutes and that one will die from breast cancer every 13 minutes. They feel they have a battle to wage.

On Sunday, the final day, many walkers are limping. The medical team members find themselves taping, treating blisters, encouraging, and doing

everything they can to help people get on their way again. It may seem odd that a transplant nurse coordinator can learn to treat feet so well in one weekend. Ask Stephanie Osborne, RN what she knows about sport injuries now! Or ask Gabriella Rivello, RNP from Trauma what the best thing to do for a foot that is covered with blisters might be... she knows. She has become the expert. As any medical crew member can tell you, they feel that they become functioning marvels on the Breast Cancer 3-Day, much to their amazement.

At the end of the 3rd day everyone arrives at the Closing Ceremony. The staff of the Breast Cancer 3-Day and the crew line the walkway as the walkers arrive, welcomed by the roar of the crowd of family and friends. At a later point in the ceremony, both walkers and crew members remove one shoe and raise it over their heads, to commemorate the walk. Then the survivor walkers enter the stage, wearing the pink victory shirts. There is not a dry eye in the house. You overhear the participants telling each other "thank you," "I love you", and "we did it!" It is complete for another year.

Every walker must raise a minimum of \$2,200.00 to walk. The Breast Cancer 3-Day raised more than \$86 million dollars in 2007. \$12 million was raised by these wonderful people I call "my walkers" in San Diego. 71% of the money raised has gone to the cause, which exceeds the Better Business Bureau Wise Giving Standards for accountability. The remainder of the funds is used for management of the event, the food, showers, and logistics that are both amazing and efficient. It's a class act, and one of which I feel very blessed to be a part.

I would like everyone at UCSD to be a part of this team with me. The opportunity is there for anyone to join. We will find a spot for you. Come spend 3 days with us!

*For information about joining the UCSD medical team for the San Diego Breast Cancer 3-Day, please contact Leann Cortimiglia at [lcortimiglia@ucsd.edu](mailto:lcortimiglia@ucsd.edu) or call (619) 543-6505.*

